

Advice for Talking to Your Doctor and Care Team

A new cancer diagnosis can feel like an overwhelming experience. Suddenly, there is so much new information about your cancer to understand and urgency to begin treatment. Take a breath and check out advice for getting the most out of the appointments with your new doctor and care team.



Prepare an agenda.

Doctors have limited time with each patient so the experience can feel rushed, and it can be frustrating to feel like some of your questions weren't answered. Set aside 30 minutes before each appointment to write down your questions and concerns. If a caregiver is involved in your treatment, they may have suggestions too. Don't hesitate to show the list to your doctor at the beginning of the appointment. They'll appreciate your willingness to be part of the care team.

Consider bringing a caregiver or close friend to your appointment.

Doctor appointments can be filled with emotions, and it can be challenging to absorb information about your diagnosis, health and medications at the same time. Having someone join you in these appointments can relieve some of the stress. It's a good idea to check with your doctor's office to confirm their policy in advance.



Be open, honest, and straightforward.

Your doctor and their team will be able to provide the best possible care when they understand the full extent of your symptoms and medical history. This information could potentially lead to your doctor modifying your treatment plan or the nurses adjusting their approach. These conversations can feel embarrassing but will ensure you get the best care.

Practice active listening and take notes.

Active listeners engage with others through a variety of listening techniques to promote respect and understanding, but active listening also increases retention of information. Some active listening techniques include paraphrasing a response back to the speaker, asking relevant questions, and withholding an immediate response until the speaker is finished. Couple these techniques with note taking and you will be positioned to gain a greater understanding of your diagnosis and treatment plan.



Don't be afraid to ask your doctor for another appointment.

There can be pressure at the end of the appointment to finish the conversation and make decisions about your care. If you need more time to consider the options or discuss at greater length, you can ask your doctor for more time or schedule a follow-up visit. This may also provide an opportunity to obtain a second opinion before committing to a treatment plan. Your confidence in the plan is a high priority to the entire care team.